



Even 'clean' and 'green' energy have an environmental impact

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A growing "good" vs. "bad" narrative is taking shape in regards to energy. Renewable energy and batteries are good. Fossil and nuclear energy are bad.

The message of the narrative — now learned by kids in school and touted by well intentioned, if not biased, politicians, activists, educators, and even religious leaders — goes something like this: Fossil energy is bad because coal, oil and natural gas produce carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other harmful emissions, and they require mining and drilling. Nuclear is bad because it produces radioactive waste. Ignoring the fact that fossil fuels and nuclear together comprise some 90 percent of global energy, we are told to "keep it in the ground."

Renewables are good because hydro, solar, wind, waves and tides have low emissions. And biofuels come from plants, which are "green." Batteries are good because electricity has no emissions.

If only it were so simple. Assigning words to energy such as "clean" and "dirty," or "good" and "bad," is disingenuous. The unfortunate reality is that all energy, at scale, has environmental effects. We are better served in the long run by open, fact-based conversations in our schools, workplaces, governments and universities about the challenges and benefits of all energy.

Let's start with wind. Texas is by far the leading state in the U.S. for wind capacity and generation. Across the vast West Texas plain are wind turbines, tens of thousands of them, rising 300 feet above the ground and providing a steady source of revenue for struggling West Texas ranchers.

Even if you don't mind the visual landscape damage, wind turbines cast strobe shadows, create variable levels of noise, cause migratory bird damage, are constructed from metals mined from the earth, and transmit electricity across major power-line corridors to urban areas. Of course, when the wind is not blowing at the proper speed, which happens often, it is mostly backed up by natural gas power plants and, down the road, batteries, grid adaptation, or something else.

Solar has similar, and a few different, challenges. No strobe or noise



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